

**House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health:
Legislative Day Hearing**

Written Testimony of Rep. Brenda L. Lawrence (MI-14)

Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present my views on H.R. 2521, the DOULA for VA Act of 2021.

I am proud to introduce the legislation in partnership with the leaders of the Bipartisan Women's Caucus to provide increased access for doula care to veterans. This bipartisan legislation would establish a pilot program to encourage the use of doulas in the Veterans Health Administration to support pregnant veterans and improve maternal health outcomes.

Increasingly, women veterans have been relying on the Veterans Health Administration for maternal health services.

Pregnant veterans have been found to be disproportionately impacted by mental health disorders, so we must ensure that they are afforded adequate support to prevent childbirth complications.

Research has demonstrated that expectant mothers are more likely to have positive birth outcomes when provided with the support of a doula than those without.

This legislation requires the Department of Veteran Affairs to establish a pilot program to furnish veterans with doula support services and to measure the impact these services have on pregnant veterans' childbirth, mental health, and infant care outcomes.

This program would incentivize veterans to receive VA care during and after their pregnancy, potentially lowering the likelihood of pregnancy complications which could harm the mother or the child.

It will also improve the experience of veterans receiving maternity care from the Department, including their ability to develop and follow their own birthing plan.

The pilot program will be developed through consultation with stakeholders, including veterans' organizations, community-based health care professionals such as doulas, and experts in promoting health equity and combatting racial bias in health care settings.

Again, let me just re-emphasize that the goals of the pilot program are to improve:

- maternal, mental, and infant health care outcomes;
- the integration of doula support services into the Whole Health model of the Department, or successor model; and
- the experience of women receiving maternity care from the Department, including by increasing the ability of a woman to develop and follow her own birthing plan.

I want to thank the Chairwoman and Ranking Member for providing me with an opportunity to testify before you today, and I yield back.